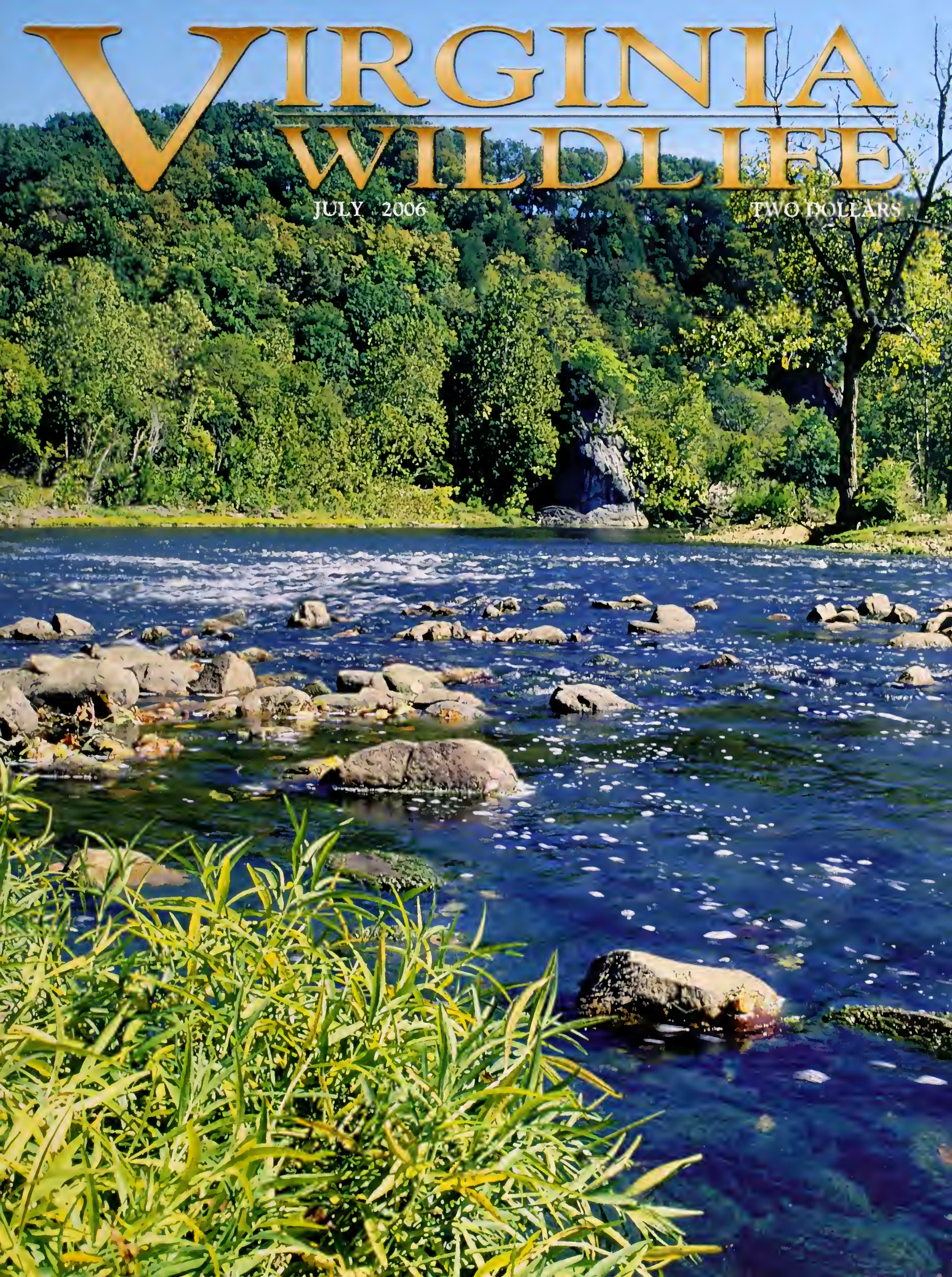
VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

JULY 2006

TWO DOLLARS



Colonel W. Gerald Massengill

Interim Director

After nearly a century of manually processing and storing handwritten licenses to hunt, fish and trap in Virginia, I'm pleased to announce that on July 1, the Department's new state of the art, computerized, license sales system will be fully activated. The new system offers enhanced convenience for hunters and anglers to purchase and replace their licenses, and will also facilitate subsequent license purchases from year-to-year. All of our more than 400 license agents will be working on the same system regardless of whether they operate from a local bait shop, a big name retail outlet, online or by telephone. This network will allow us to improve communications with the people who purchase our licenses. For the first time ever, we'll have real time information that will provide improved service to hunters and anglers.

Probably the biggest change that hunters, trappers and anglers will immediately see is that their licenses will be good for one year from the date of purchase. This means that, for example, if you purchase your fishing license on July 4th, 2006, instead of it expiring at the end of the calendar year, it will now be good until July 3, 2007; and if you purchase your hunting license on September 1, 2006, it will now be good until August 31, 2007, instead of expiring on June 30 (the end of the fiscal year), as in previous times.

There are two exceptions to the year from date of purchase expiration: the big game license which includes bear, deer and turkey tags, and the National Forest Stamp. Both of those will remain valid from July 1 through the following June 30, regardless of when purchased.

It'll be easy to keep up with expiration dates because they'll be clearly printed on the license. To make the process even more convenient, we recommend that sportsmen and sportswomen purchase all their licenses early and all at the same time. That way, all the licenses can be printed on one piece of paper and will have the same expiration date.

Not only do we have good news for the hunters and anglers of Virginia, but boaters can now enjoy the newly restored Gloucester Point Boat Landing, located on the lower York River and one of the Commonwealth's most popular boat ramps. More than 100,000 boats are registered within a one-hour drive of this launch site that features deep-water access for large powerboats.

The ramp had been severely damaged by Hurricane Isabel and has taken almost four years and close to $1 million to rebuild. Restoration was made possible when a unique partnership was forged between local, state and federal agencies. While the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries oversaw the effort, the project involved support from Gloucester County, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences, the Virginia Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

I am reminded that much of the work here at the Department can takes years in the making and often only becomes visible to the public with the unveiling of projects, such as our new license system or the renovation of one of Virginia's most popular boat ramps. If your summer vacation involves boating, fishing or wildlife watching, I hope you will remember that the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is constantly working to provide better-quality recreational opportunities for you and for all Virginians. Take some time this summer to enjoy our great outdoors and you will have experiences that might just last a lifetime. □

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

Commonwealth of Virginia
Timothy M. Kaine, Governor

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Color separations and printing by
Nittany Valley Offset, State College, PA.

Virginia Wildlife (ISSN 0042 6792) is published monthly by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Send all subscription orders and address changes to *Virginia Wildlife*, P. O. Box 7477, Red Oak Iowa 51591-0477. Address all other communications concerning this publication to *Virginia Wildlife*, P. O Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond Virginia 23230-1104. Subscription rates are $12.95 for one year, $23.95 for two years; $2.00 per each back issue, subject to availability. Out-of-country rate is $24.95 for one year and must be paid in U.S. funds No refunds for amounts less than $5.00. **To subscribe, call toll-free (800) 710-9369.** Postmaster Please send all address changes to *Virginia Wildlife* P.O. Box 7477, Red Oak, Iowa 51591-0477. Postage for periodicals paid at Richmond, Virginia and additional entry offices.

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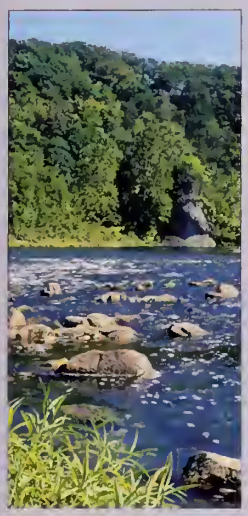

About the cover: Rich in history and outdoor opportunities, the Shenandoah River is actually three rivers in one–the North Fork, the South Fork and the Mainstem. The Shenandoah River Watershed includes the counties of Augusta, Frederick, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Page and Warren and parts of the George Washington-Jefferson National Forest and covers an area of over 1.5 million acres. The North Fork and South Fork converge at Front Royal to make up the Mainstem, which flows north for approximately another 60 miles until it empties into the Potomac River at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. photo ©Dwight Dyke

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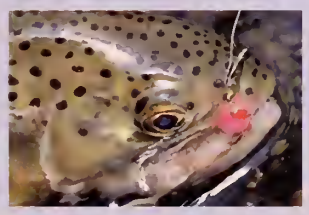

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Fish On!

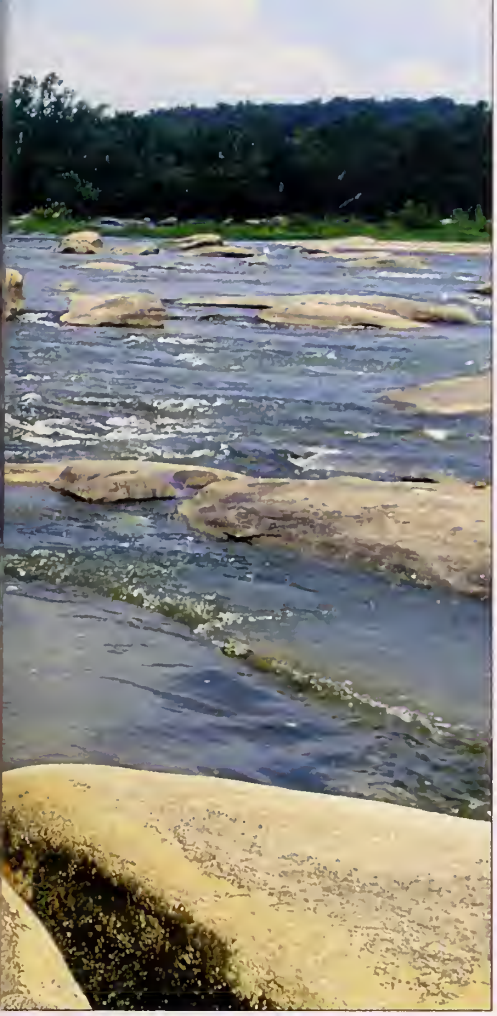
by Tee Clarkson
photos ©Dwight Dyke

This summer why not turn your vacation time into an educational angling extravaganza?

When Mike Ostrander climbed up the steep bank cradling a 5-pound flathead catfish, the conversations quickly hushed and all eyes swung in his direction. Mission accomplished. No, it wasn't the biggest flathead in the James River, in fact it was a pretty small fish for the Pony Pasture section in Richmond, but it served its purpose this morning, exciting the group of six women and five men that made up the day's participants in a flathead fishing workshop hosted by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' (VDGIF) Outdoor Education Program. As Mike lovingly stroked the fish's flat forehead (hence the name Flathead), a flight of six geese dropped from the gray sky and settled noisily into an eddy in the middle of the river. Several moments later, an osprey plummeted like a predatorial jackhammer into a shallow riffle, coming up empty taloned, much to its chagrin. What a classroom!

Mike Ostrander spends hundreds of days a year guiding for flatheads and blue cats on the James. If there is anyone around that has a Ph.D. in flathead fishing it's Mike. Proving his ability as a "Professor of Flatheads," he described everything from the types of equipment to use, the type of bait, sinkers, hooks, knots, even demonstrating how a flathead attacks its prey using a small drybag to imitate the wide mouth of the large fish. The 10 participants had come from around the state to take part in this workshop: Chantilly, Virginia Beach, Charlottesville, Buckingham and Richmond.

The VDGIF's Outdoor Education Program hosts dozens of workshops over the course of the year ranging from crossbow hunting to mother/daughter weekends. "Getting people outdoors and enjoying the outdoors safely through fishing, shooting sports and all outdoor activities is the primary mission of the Outdoor Education Program," said



Above: Mike Ostrander of James River Fishing School (jamesriverfishing.com) shows the class how to properly rig for flatheads on the James River.

Karen Holson who supervises the program. In this instance an event was created "that gets people into fishing and also provides species specific education." The workshops are designed for all levels of fishermen and women, whether it's a novice angler that just wants an opportunity to do some fishing or a veteran who wants to learn a specific technique or about targeting a particular species.

Attracting women and young people to these events is a chief goal of the Outdoor Education Program for the Department. Karen points out that "traditionally men fish, and we want to target youth and women, especially women in single parent homes." The idea is to "target those with little experience or exposure" in hopes of providing women with knowledge so they can take their children fishing and continue the cycle of outdoor pursuits. Jimmy Mootz who heads the outreach division of the Outdoor Education Program provides information and education to the community through events ranging from kayaking, to animal tracking, to wilderness survival. He notes "with the urbanization of more and more rural areas, the aspect of outdoor traditions being passed down from grandfather to son to grandson is dying off, so we're trying to step in and perform a roll in that process."

With these goals in mind, this flathead catfishing workshop primarily targeted women who were interested in learning more about this type of angling. The participants were broken up into five two-person teams, led by game wardens, biologists and volunteers from the Department. After 30 minutes of instruction these fishermen and women were ready to hit the water.

Decked in bright yellow life jackets and carrying large rods provided by the Game Department, the entire group began marching down Riverside Drive that runs parallel to the James River for several miles. The morning was silent but for the tapping of rubber soles on the pavement and the soft rush of the river to the

Top: Flathead catfish can usually be found in deeper holes below rapids like these during the summer months. Above: When water gets low and clear in the summer, positioning yourself on rocks above deep holes is an effective way to fish any moving water.

right. An excitement radiated, as they got closer to the designated fishing area, building among them in a collective force. The participants, who had been moving single file along the side of the road, began jockeying for position, moving beside and ahead of each other, all racing unconsciously toward the deep holes that they had been told held gargantuan flatheads.

The group included Liz Montgomery and Judy Bartlett, two friends that had come from Charlottesville to take part in the workshop. They had taken a Women in the Outdoors program hosted by the Department in the past, and found out about this class on the Game Department's Web site (dgif.virginia.gov). Directly behind them Terry Pringle from Chantilly looked anxiously out at the river, a look of excitement clearly overcoming his face. This was also his second event with the Game Department. He was "so impressed with the organization and enthusiasm of the instructors" at a class at Twin Lakes that he decided to take another. Besides he said, "I have never had this opportunity before, and I'm tired of seeing Bill Dance haul them all in on TV."

Left: Angela Kerr of Virginia Beach and John Lofgren of Richmond try their luck from some rocks in the middle of the James River. Above: Angela hoists a nice flathead while Annie Gottschamer and Frank Mundy look on. Right: This flathead measured 40 1/2 inches in length and weighed 25 1/2 pounds.

The group marched on through the shallows and continued to the edge of a deep hole, armed with several dozen live bluegill for bait. Within several minutes the first rod doubled over. As Mike shouted "Fish on!" in garbled barbaric yawp a cheer went down the line that had formed along the edge of the deep water and several fists flew to the sky, signaling triumph. Clearly this was not a good day to be a flathead living in this hole.

Above: Up to her neck in fun, Angela Kerr of Virginia Beach hoists her citation catch.

Several more fish surrendered to the group before lunch, highlighted by Angela Kerr's 25 pound, 40 ½-inch citation, her biggest fish ever. With a glaze of adrenaline still rushing over her eyes, Angela described the experience in one telling word, "Awesome!" she said.

Reluctantly this marauding band finally gave in to hunger and retreated to the shade of several large trees for lunch. Chris Dunnavant waited there, with sandwiches and drinks provided by the Game Department. Chris came on as the Angling Coordinator for the Outdoor Education Program a year ago after the responsibilities of angling education were transferred from the Fisheries Department to Outdoor Education in 2004. Having spent five years on the pro bass circuit before joining the program, Chris has a deep love and knowledge of fishing, and, perhaps more importantly, teaching fishing. His vision of the future of fishing education includes a network of fishing guides and expert volunteers across the state teaching various workshops, plus a focus on teaching fishing in the public schools. With noticeable excitement, he points out, "if every middle school and high school across the state included a fishing program, we could reach every kid with a fishing experience before they were old enough to drive."

Bellies now full and the sun rising high in the August sky, the group eased somewhat more slowly back to the edge of the large hole. "I just love being here," said Judy Bartlett of Charlottesville, as she leaned back into the current, her head barely visible above the moving water. "I don't care whether I catch a fish or not." A true fisherwoman is born. Mission accomplished. □

Tee Clarkson is an English teacher and in his spare time runs Virginia Fishing Adventures, a fishing camp for kids. For more information you can contact Tee at: tsclarkson@virginiafishingadventures.com.

For information on upcoming workshops go to the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Web site (www.dgif.virginia.gov) and click on Education.

For further information about catfishing on the James River, contact Mike Ostrander: mike@jamesriverfishing.com.

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A Blooming Good Idea

Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden is one of Richmond's most visited sights and best example of a learning landscape in progress.

by Marika Byrd

On a sunny, hot day I entered the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden (Garden) through the black iron fence, overlooked the neatly landscaped lawn and continued three tenths of a mile to the parking area at the E. Clairborne Robins Visitors Center. These lots are dressed with flowers, shrubs and trees—none of the large, tarmac parking areas. The Robins Visitors Center is the start for any tour. The center is home to the Garden Shop, Garden Café, ticket, membership and volunteer information areas.

"It has become one of the top jewels of the Richmond Metro area that has more than 200,000 visitors annually, says Beth Monroe, Public Relations and Marketing at the Garden. Our mission is "focused on public education, with year-round programming available, and to become one of the top botanical gardens in North America," she adds.

Forty of the 82 acres have been developed to showcase the vast horticultural offerings, which include: one of the East Coast's largest and diverse perennial gardens, a Four Seasons Garden, a Healing Garden, the

Left: With its 63-foot tall dome, The Conservatory is considered the "crown jewel" of the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Below: The E. Claiborne Robins Visitors Center, which features an exhibit gallery, meeting spaces, outdoor terraces, Garden Shop and Garden Café greets visitors as they enter.

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Grace Arents Gardena Victorian-style Garden restored by The Garden Club of Virginia, the Martha and Reed West Island Garden, an exotic Asian–style garden, a stunning display in a wetland environment, a dwarf conifer garden, and a birding trail are among a few of the areas to visit at The Garden. The Garden's impressive plant arrangements, landscape and buildings will delight your visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile senses.

The Garden's Humble Beginnings

An Indian hunting ground, a recreational center, a children's hospital and a residence each occupied the property before it became Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Monroe related.

In 1984 Grace Arents, an avid gardener, realized her dream to honor her uncle Lewis Ginter by purchasing the property he owned in the late 1800s. The Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden became a reality with the established foundation through Arents' will.

The late Lewis Ginter, himself, was a prominent local businessperson, associated in the tobacco industry and "seasoned world traveler."

Partnerships with local organizations have helped the Garden to develop and maintain their programs, and provide a wide variety of fauna and flora that is displayed year round. These partnerships are too numerous to mention; however, some are cited below.

A small staff and numerous volunteers constantly work to maintain and improve the complex and draw masses of visitors annually. Without the staff and volunteers, in particular, this facility would not exist in the format it does today.

Birding Trail and Backyard Habitat

In May of 2003 a new birding trail was opened which provides wildlife watchers a mile long trail that loops through "paradise" as they look for the variety of settings found throughout the Garden. Just follow the "bird" trail markers through developed woodlands, meadows and other habitat settings. Bird feeding stations and some bluebird boxes are displayed around the garden lake and the historic Bloemendaal House.

Traverse the trail to see what species of shrubs, trees and winged friends you can recognize, or consult a field guide to identify and add new species to your list. What habitat do you want to add to your home environment to attract some of the animals you see on your travels in the Garden? This would also be a good site to take notes to develop or improve your own backyard habitat.

A program partnership with the Richmond Audubon Society, Richmond Horticultural Association, Virginia Bluebird Society, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., Virginia Green Industry Council, and the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association has

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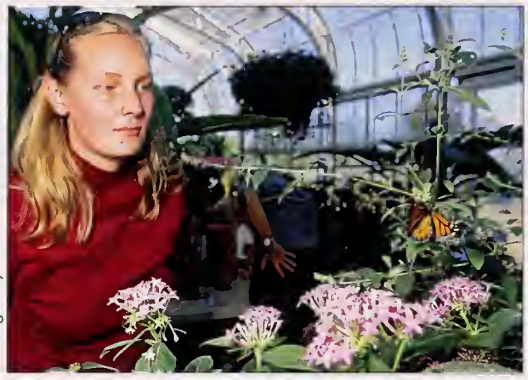
Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden is a prime destination on Virginia's Birding and Wildlife Trail. It not only delights visitors with its colorful gardens, but also offers excellent bird and butterfly watching.

©Dwight Dyke

Thousands of children and students converge on Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden each year to experience learning opportunities that offer a close-up and hands-on approach to the natural world around them.

helped to improve the birding trail and its habitat over the years.

If you would like to take a Beginning Birding class, the University of Richmond offers this course jointly with the Garden.



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The Garden is just one stop on the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail in the Coastal region.

The Conservatory

Monroe relates, "The Conservatory is the only classical, domed conservatory in the state. The magnificent glass building soars to a height of 63 feet and features exotic and unusual plants from subtropical and tropical regions of the world. The 'jewel' of the Garden, the Conservatory houses a tropical wing with beautiful orchids and a wing with changing displays of flowering and colorful plants." In 2004 you could see Mr. McGregor's House (of Peter Rabbit fame) and view a variety of butterflies in a very humid environment, flitting among the tropical plants. Imagine seeing a close-up view of swallowtail or zebra butterflies, to name just two of the species I saw that day.

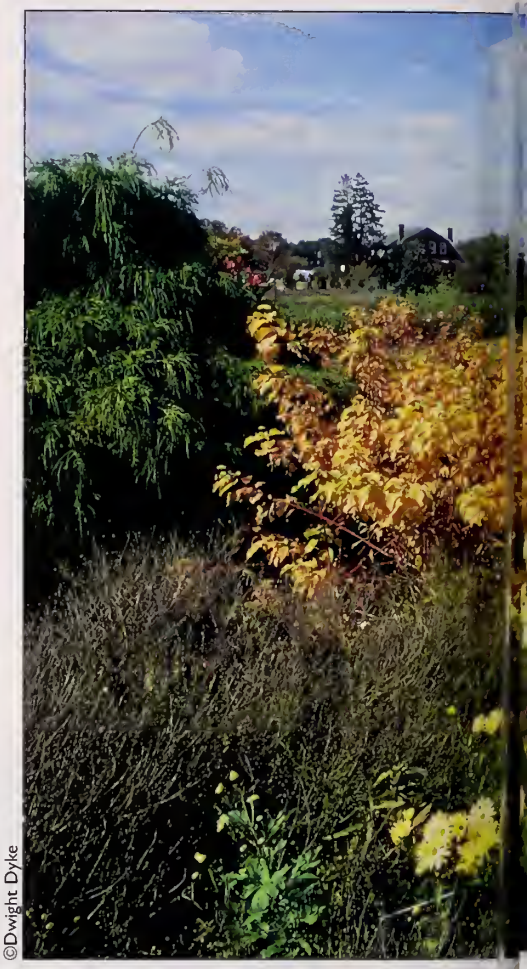
Educational Programming for Everyone

The Garden has a vast educational component. "Throughout the year many classes are offered to the public and educational groups," adds Monroe. Over 16,000 school children annually use Mother Nature's landscape to reinforce their indoor learning experiences. Randy Humphrey, Educational Manager, conducts group tours. She says, "Teachers and elementary students love it because of the hands-on learning that takes place and supplements the classroom presentations. The programming is overwhelmingly popular and is aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning."

One fall day a group of students from Tuckahoe Elementary School, in Henrico County, were ready to depart after a wonderful, sunny respite from the classroom. Two teachers brought their charges to the outdoor-classroom as part of their study of plant systems. One youngster was so excited because he "ate lettuce fresh from the garden"—apparently he was used to the harvested, cleaned and packaged offerings from the local grocery store.

I was raised on a farm and recognize that many people, students and adults alike, are being raised in an urban environment and hardly ever experience what it is to grow, harvest and eat their own table fare. The exposure to the Garden offerings helps them understand how food gets from the ground to the table.

Adults have an opportunity to develop their knowledge, horticul-



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No matter what time of year The Conservatory offers up a full display of seasonal colors. The Palm House, which is a semi-tropical wing of The Conservatory, also features a unique and beautiful collection of orchids and other tropical plants.

©Dwight Dyke

tural skills, landscape design, or just get a "green thumb" with the educational offerings.

The Education and Library Complex offers classes on "botanical illustration, floral design techniques, and basic home landscape design in state-of-the art classrooms, laboratory and auditorium." The Lorna M. Robins Library holds "an impressive collection of horticultural and botanical resources, which are available to the public with a paid admission. Book circulation is available to garden members with more than 5,500 volumes on topics of horticulture, botany, natural history, conservation, garden history, etc. Both adult and children's books are available. The Library Complex also houses "a rare book and archives collection," pens Kirk.

The Garden and the School of Continuing Studies, at the University of Richmond (U. of R.) partner in certificate programs. Susanne Wick, Program Specialist for the Landscape Design program, says their certificate courses are of interest to landscape professionals, horticulture staff, and gardeners with an interest in plants and design. In 2007, Wick says the U. of R. anticipates having 25 graduates of the Woody Plant Landscape and the Landscape Design programs, which take one year and two years to complete respectively. The night classes are small and held at the Garden.

Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden offers year round activities that are designed to attract people of all ages. It has also partnered with local clubs and universities to give people a chance to learn more about horticulture and landscaping.

©Dwight Dyke

Also, for those interested there is a program agreement with Virginia Tech to apply for transfer to the Tech Masters program at the Alexandria campus.

Additionally, the Garden can offer specialized and customized group presentations to the public and private sector.

Under a 2004 agreement, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and the Garden jointly operate a herbarium collection housed in the Garden's Library Complex. At the invitation of Dr. Gregory M. Plunkett, Associate Professor and Herbarium Curator, Department of Biology at VCU, I recently got an up-close-and-personal view of several specimens. The VCU collection contains about 17,000 dried plant specimens, representing mostly native plants collected in the eastern United States. The Garden's specimens are taken from about 4,000 mostly ornamental plants at their facility and in Chesterfield and Henrico counties.

The Garden volunteers and biology students at VCU help to preserve and record information on the biodiversity of the region. The herbarium is a resource for plant specialists who use it for projects ranging from DNA research to studies in biodiversity. There are plans to create a database, digitize the collection and make the database information available to the public, says Plunkett. There are future plans for college students to study plants, do research at the Garden and to look at common patterns from different herbariums.

These collections can be accessed for valid research purposes and re-

quires an appointment, which can be made with through librarians. Researchers borrowing specimens provide a written report based on their expert examination. This allows the collections to have documented expert information about the specimens and to verify the information submitted by the collector, says Plunkett.

The Children's Garden—The Newest Blossoming Program

One of the ways children have a positive learning experience is playing at the Children's Wear Daily (CWD) Children's Garden. Monroe says this garden "is a learning landscape where children can enjoy the freedom to explore the natural world." The newest addition was dedicated September 24-25, 2005. The one and a half acres is part of the Garden's Master Plan developed in 1995."

The CWD Children's Garden is designed for pre-school through elementary-aged youngsters to "provide an environment that builds social, emotional, physical and creative competencies. Home schooled families can also benefit from this programming. However, children of all ages can enjoy and explore the surroundings.

Features of the CWD Children's Garden include:

- "International Village features the world's varied architecture, cultures, gardens and indigenous plants.
- Adventure Pathway explores prairie, butterfly meadow and evergreen forest environments with special surprise discoveries along the way.
- Water Play is great for cooling off under the fountains and jets during the hot times of the year.
- Weird and Contrasting Plants demonstrate the truly unbelievable diversity and adaptation of plants in their environment—soft and hard, sweet and stinky, small and large specimens.
- Farm Garden is where children can plant and watch grow fruits and vegetables that make up the bulk of the world's diet. The planting beds are accessible to the mobility impaired.
- Activity Centers and the Sand Play Area are where children can design landscapes, pursue art and performance programs, build projects with natural materials and even do a little digging.

©Dwight Dyke

With hundreds of trees and plant species, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden is a great place to test your plant and tree identification skills.

- Leafy Overlook and the Tree House is universally accessible for strollers, walkers and the mobility impaired, that promises fun and excitement for children of all ages. The Tree House is a 22 foot diameter, 13 feet above ground structure. Children of all ages get a panoramic, "birds-eye-view" through the "windows on the world" around the Garden. A $5,000 "Quality of Life" grant from the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation made the tree house accessible.

One young lady was so excited to go into the tree house. It was something she had wanted to do in her youth but a mobility impairment pre-

©Dwight Dyke

Designed specifically for pre-school through elementary age groups, The Children's Garden is one of the newest additions to spring up at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.

vented participation. The ramp led her to another world of experience in adulthood. During my growing up there was no such tree house, so this was also a wonderful experience at this retirement stage of my life.

A 200-year old mulberry is so tempting for youngsters. Its massive, low branching limbs allow children to climb about without a boost up from an adult. Children from two elementary schools in Henrico County were enjoying their visit in November of last year when I visited the newest "baby on the block." Humphrey says they have to remind students that "you wouldn't be rough on your grandmother and to climb very gently."

Other Activities

Groovin' in the Garden is an annual summer music event. With paid admission, chairs and blankets in hand, visitors experience a once-a-week, evening concert by various artists.

The Festival of Lights, from Thanksgiving through New Years, shows off the garden in a different "light" during the evening. In 2005 over 600,000 lights were strung across the ground, over arches, around animal and floral forms for the holiday season. Many volunteers and staff hours are used to make this gift to the public annually. A small Garden admission fee is required.

Put on a good pair of walking shoes, grab season-appropriate cover, binoculars, a field guide and share this garden jewel with your family and friends throughout the year. What a way to explore nature, get a good workout, and share camaraderie.

Marika Byrd is a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife and is a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association, Inc.

Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden
1800 Lakeside Avenue (at Hilliard Road) Richmond, VA 23228-4700
www.lewisginter.org (804) 262-9887

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Above: Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden is a great place for a leisurely stroll to admire the thousands of blooming plants or to do some wildlife watching. The Garden is also a great place to soak in unique horticultural displays that include water gardens with plants that thrive in a diverse ecosystem and even The Healing Garden that highlights some of the fundamental uses of plants for medicine and healing.

©Dwight Dyke

WILLIAM ROGE

by David Hart

Virginia's highest peak not only offers stunning scenery, but is home to one of the best trout fishing spots in the state.

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Somewhere ahead of us, or maybe behind us, a road cuts to the right and follows the serpentine path of a narrow stream whose name I can't recall. The details can be filled in later, but now, Bradley Clarke and I are in a race against the waning hours of daylight. I am trying to hammer out the final pages of my book, *Fly Fisher's Guide To Virginia*, and the trout streams in the shadow of Mt. Rogers, Virginia's highest peak, are proving to be a formidable task. There are more than a dozen streams that range from rivers to small, step-across streams in the area, all of them teeming with wild or stocked trout, some with both. It's my job to sample each one and offer an insider's review of the fishing opportunities.

Clarke is sitting in the passenger seat of my truck, a tattered DeLorme Atlas held close to his face as he traces the thin red lines that create a confusing mess of spaghetti spilled across the pages. Empty food wrappers and soda bottles litter the floor of my Ford and various gear is strewn across the back seat. Fly rods rattle in the back of the truck, no doubt taking a beating they don't deserve.

"Should be coming up," he says. His voice is heavy with uncertainty, but he's right. I veer off the asphalt and head up a washboard gravel road that parallels the tiny stream. Quarters, pennies and dimes bounce from my ashtray as I study the clear stream that crosses back and forth

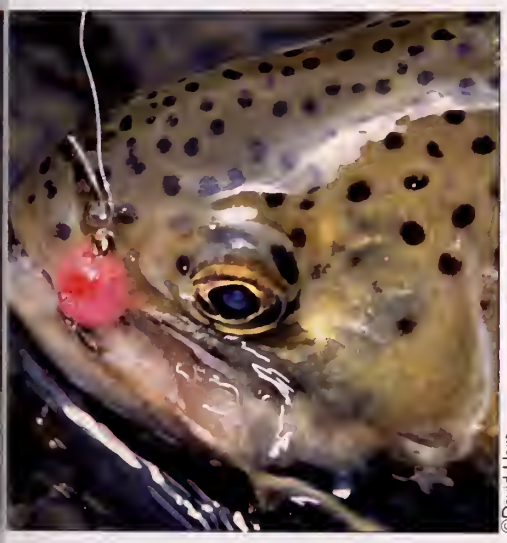
Whitetop Laurel holds good numbers of fish and is a favorite of anglers who visit the Mt. Rodgers area. Fish samples by Department fisheries biologists have indicated that Whitetop Laurel Creek has a healthy population of trout including rainbows and browns.

RS' TROUT

under the National Forest Service road. This creek is no different than so many others that tumble off the ridges and through the shaded hollows of the southern Appalachians. In a matter of minutes, I confirm what I already know: This tributary of the South Fork of the Holston River has trout. Practically all of them do.

Farther to the north and what seemed like years ago, I skipped my way across the Shenandoah National Park, flicking dry flies and nymphs to the dark pools and cold riffles of places like Big Run, Rapidan River and more than a dozen other trout-filled streams. Plucking native brook trout from the tumbling waters of the Park was fun, but it seemed a bit too easy at times. Brookies can be push-overs. The wide open opportunities of the trout streams around Mt. Rogers offer a sense of freedom and adventure that can't be found anywhere else in the state. Some waters have brook trout, others have rainbows and still others have browns. Some have two species or even all three. And many of them flow through public land.

William Barton Rogers is perhaps best known as the founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But Rogers, whose name was given to Virginia's highest peak after his death in 1882, had deep roots in Virginia. Although he was born in Philadelphia in 1804, he graduated from William & Mary and served as a professor of geology at his alma mater and later at the University of Virginia from 1835 to 1853. Rogers was also head of the Virginia Geological Society. Whether or not he ever trout fished in the shadow of Virginia's highest peak is unknown, but he most likely would have caught only brook trout. Rainbows and browns aren't native to Virginia and weren't introduced to our streams until sometime in the 1940s or 1950s. Records are sketchy. In fact, unchecked logging throughout the Appalachians took a heavy toll on wild brook trout and nearly eradicated them from their historic range completely, most likely after Rogers' death.



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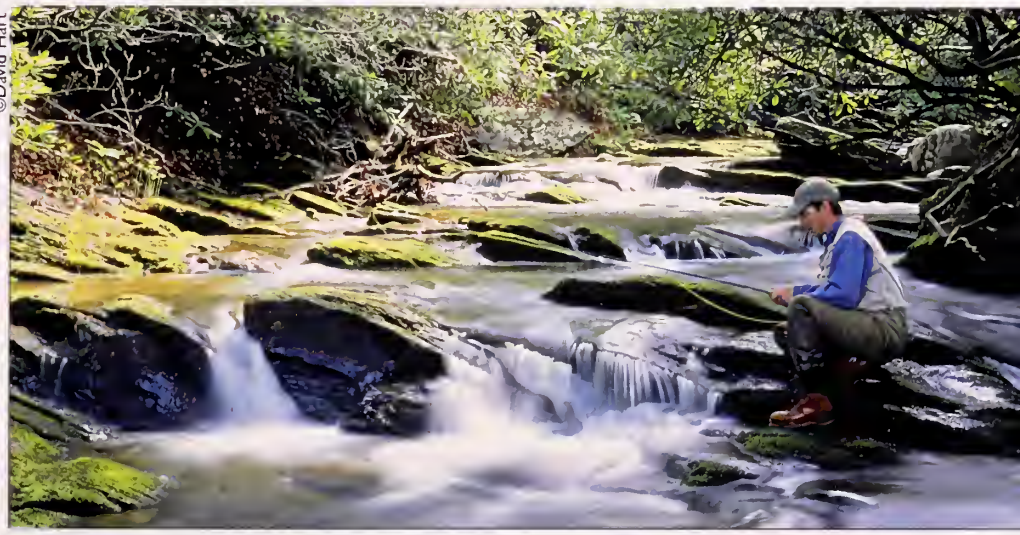

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Above left: Eggs are good all-purpose flies that work when other flies won't. They'll catch wild trout and stocked trout. Above right: Virtually every stream, even the smallest ones, in the Mt. Rogers area holds a good population of trout. However, the thick brush along many streams makes fishing for them difficult.

Times have changed. Although some timber harvest takes place on national forest lands, it's done with respect for watersheds and has virtually no impact on native trout now. The streams that died or nearly died a century ago are teeming with trout, thanks to an active management program by our fisheries biologists, a healthy respect for the resource by trout anglers and the cold, clean life-giving water that bleeds from the pores of Mt. Rogers and the surrounding mountains. Seeps trickle down deep wooded hollows, join into rivulets and then blend to form stair-step streams like Hurricane Creek and Cressy Creek. They merge in the valleys to create places like the South Fork of the Holston River and Whitetop Laurel, the two largest watersheds in the area.

Trout Unlimited named Whitetop Laurel one of America's top 100 trout streams, an honor, that after three days of fishing, I'm not sure I agree with. It's not that this largest and longest stream in the region doesn't have plenty of fish. It just doesn't give them up as easily as so many other streams.

Nearly all of Whitetop Laurel is paralleled by the Virginia Creeper Trail, a 35-mile long ribbon of crushed gravel that was once a railroad bed. Abandoned in the 1970s, the rails were pulled up and the bed sold to the National Forest Service, which turned it into a hiking, biking

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SPIN TROUT TACTICS

The term "special regulation" doesn't mean fly-fishing only. While anglers who use fly fishing gear automatically qualify for single-hook, artificial-only rules, those who prefer spinning tackle only have to make a few minor adjustments in order to fish these special reg waters.

In some cases, anglers who use spinning gear have a better shot at catching big trout, especially big browns because those larger fish prefer bigger meals. That's why crawfish crankbaits are ideal. I use Rebel Wee Craws and Teeny Wee Craws and simply remove the treble hooks and attach a single hook to the rear split ring. Browns and rainbows can't seem to resist a crawfish swimming against the current. Single-hook spinners, curly-tailed grubs and tiny jerkbaits are also great trout lures.

and horseback riding trail. While thousands of bikers whiz down the trail each year, only a few take the time to stop along the stream and make a few casts at the choicest holes. There are several parking areas that offer quick access to Whitetop Laurel, but the best way to get to unpressured waters is to do a little hiking or biking of your own.

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries biologist George Palmer says Whitetop Laurel has plenty of fish, but not many big ones. In 2004, Palmer sampled four sites, each 130 meters long, within the special regulation section. Catch rates averaged 46 rainbow and 22 brown trout per 100 meters. The rainbows averaged 7.4 inches and the browns were about 11 inches.

"It's got a good number of fish, but there just aren't a whole lot of big trout in Whitetop Laurel, although we did catch a 17-inch rainbow and a 16-inch brown last time we sampled," says Palmer.

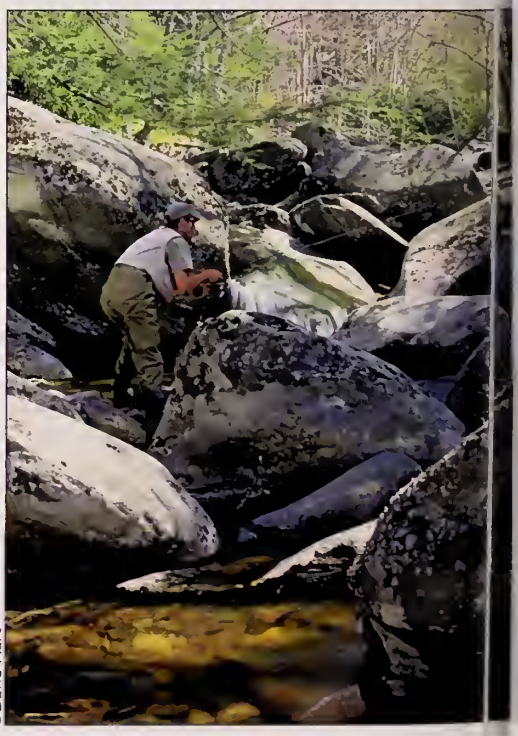
The second large watershed in the region is the South Fork of the Holston River. This stream quickly became my favorite, if only because it surrendered the largest trout in the four trips I made to the area as I researched my book. I had no business going back to the same water so many times, but the trout in the Holston were like a quick and easy fix for an addict. Not only were they willing to eat what I offered them, they were big. A few were near three pounds; at least two broke my line and several other quality fish spent a brief time in my landing net. Palmer says my experience wasn't a coincidence.

"We caught a 29-inch brown and a 23-inch rainbow from the catch-and-release section last fall. I'm guessing the brown was over 8 pounds," he says. "We get a few 5 and 6-pounders every year. The Holston has a lot of quality fish throughout the special regulation section and even below it."

Not only does this river have big trout, it has some of the highest trout densities in the state. Palmer collected an average of 77 rainbows and five browns per 100 meters of sampling last year.

Upper left and bottom: Streams with large rock formations with deep pools of water below them offer fish a place to rest and hide from predators. It is also a place where they can wait for passing food. Lower right: The stair-step pools of Big Wilson Creek are loaded with brook and rainbow trout.

©Dwight Dyke



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Grayson Highlands State Park is an excellent place to set up base camp when you explore Mt. Rogers' awesome trout fishing. The park itself has several great wild trout streams and scenic areas like Buller Dam to catch your attention.

Four miles, starting 500 feet above the dam at the Buller Fish Cultural Station, are designated as a special regulation, trophy trout stream where anglers can only use single-hook artificial lures and they can keep two trout over 16 inches. Much of this section offers some of the best dry-fly fishing water in the state. Long sections of swift, flat water flow in straight lines with overhanging limbs on both banks. The biggest rainbows and browns wait under that cover and take only food that flows within easy striking distance. That's exactly where they'll go when they get hooked.

Another section, this one located within the boundaries of the Buller Fish Cultural Station, is a single-hook, artificial lure only stretch that is stocked with fingerling rainbow and brown trout. It also has wild trout. It's within this mile-long stretch that I caught my best trout, but I caught plenty of good fish in the section above the hatchery, as well.

Numerous smaller streams tumble through the dark hollows of Mt. Rogers. While they may not surrender trout measured in pounds, they have lots of smaller fish that are always willing to entertain an angler who doesn't mind ducking through dense stands of rhododendron to get to the water. Few people are willing to go to such trouble, especially when so much other good water is there for the taking.

Straight south of Mt. Rogers' apex is Helton Creek, a medium-sized stream that flows through a reclaimed pasture within national forest boundaries. Before you get to the bar gate that marks the national forest boundary, you'll pass by a tiny pond filled with some of the biggest trout you've ever seen. It's guarded by a "No Fishing" sign and although you could probably get away with a quick cast or two, there's no telling what wrath you'll suffer if you do get caught. Besides, they don't seem like much of a challenge, at least not compared to the colorful wild rainbows waiting patiently in Helton Creek.

©David Hart

Just around the corner from Helton on U.S. 58 lies the entrance to Grayson Highlands State Park, established in 1965 and formerly named Mt. Rogers State Park. It's one of the most beautiful state parks in Virginia and a great place to use as a base camp for a weekend of trout fishing. In fact, four wild trout streams flow through the park and all can be reached via maintained trails. The largest, Big Wilson, is loaded with rainbows and brook trout. I caught trout after trout on Royal Wulffs and Mr. Rapidans one warm day in May in the lower section, accessible by a potholed gravel road a few miles east of the park entrance. It's at this lower end that you'll find one of the most stunning trout streams in the state. Huge boulders fill the narrow streambed, creating an obstacle course that requires careful consideration and a little hand-over-fist climbing. The effort is worth it. The water flows over, under and around those boulders, creating a series of braided waterfalls, runs, riffles and pools. Each hole seemed to hold a handsome wild rainbow or brook trout that rarely hesitated to take a whack at my fly as it drifted over their heads.

Fox Creek, Comers Creek, Lewis Fork and a handful of other public waters all offer a diverse and challenging fishing opportunity. Just make sure you take a good map and give yourself plenty of time. The trout fishing in the shadow of Mt. Rogers is too good to rush through.

David Hart is a full-time freelance writer and photographer from Rice. He is a regular contributor to numerous national hunting and fishing magazines and he is the author of "Fly Fisher's Guide to Virginia, Including West Virginia's Best Waters."

Murray's Shenandoah Sunfish Slider

Murray's Shenandoah Gray Scaled Chugger

Big Bug Basics

Murray's Shenandoah Chartreuse Slider

A hardheaded approach for catching smallmouth bass on the surface.

by Harry Murray

If there is a game fish and an angling tactic, which are perfect for each other, it would have to be Virginia's smallmouth bass and the hard head surface bug. Fortunately, master anglers Joe Brooks and Bill Gallash, both of Richmond, recognized this over 50 years ago and started us all out on the right track.

©Harry Murray

The author prepares to land a nice smallmouth bass that took his Shenandoah Sunfish Slider fished over a shallow gravel bar. When looking for big smallmouth look for areas where sunfish live.

Both of these gentlemen were special friends and they generously shared their insights on tactics and bug designs.

In order to catch large smallmouth bass consistently throughout the season, in all types of stream cover, we now build our hard head surface bugs in three styles in a variety of colors. The bugs are actually constructed with different style heads, which are capable of producing distinctly different actions. The specific names of these bugs are indicative of the type action you can produce with them.

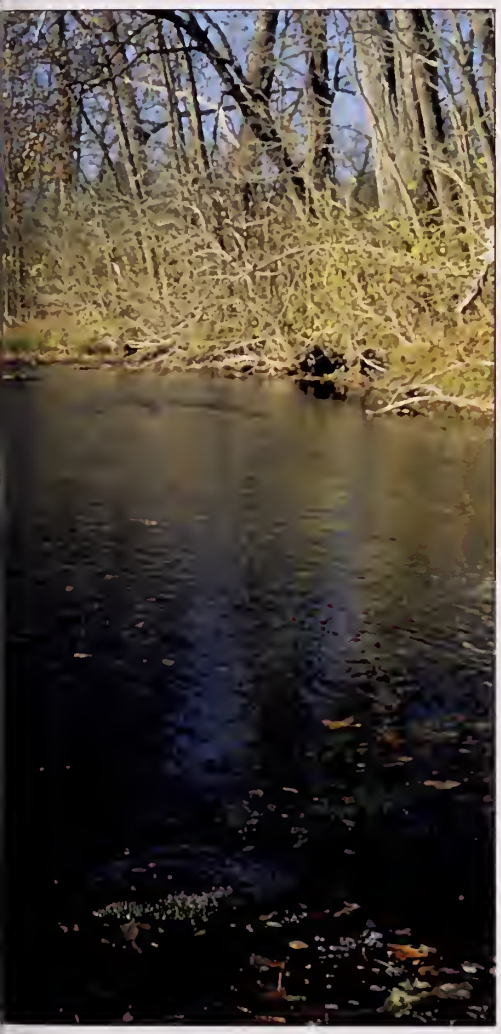
First, we'll examine the differences in these bugs and then see how and where to fish them.

The Shenandoah Slider has a long, slim body with a smoothly tapered, pointed nose which enables you to fish it with a gentle teasing action.

The Shenandoah Chuggar has a short, fat body with a deeply cut,

cupped face which helps you fish it with a great racket on the surface when you need to attract the attention of the bass.

The Shenandoah Popper has a smoothly tapered, long body with a flat gently up-sloping face which enables you to fish it in a broad variety of situations with many different actions.



The Shenandoah Chartreuse Slider, size 6, is perfect for fishing the shaded riverbanks over cobblestone stream bottoms where the water is 2 to 3 feet deep. The bass holding here are here to feed and a gentle teasing action will take many of them. This is the area in which many of the students in my fly fishing school catch most of their bass.

The most effective tactic is to wade downstream 40 feet from the bank and cast your Slider down and across stream at a 20-degree angle so your bug lands a foot from the bank. Immediately extend your fly rod up and out over the stream at a 45-degree angle and mend the line upstream just enough to cause the Slider to wiggle gently. Allow it to drift naturally with the current for 10 seconds then apply a second mend to bring it to life. You can repeat this three or four times, after which the current takes over and pulls your Slider off the bank in an unnatural manner. When this occurs you need to wade downstream 10 feet and repeat the casting and mending tactic. By wading slowly down the river and using this method you can catch many nice bass. There are many stretches on the North Fork of the Shenandoah River east of Edinburg where you can use this tactic to fish several miles of the river.

The Shenandoah Sunfish Slider, size 4, will help you catch many smallmouth bass below islands in water 2 to 4 feet deep, over marble-size gravel, in June and July. At this time the bass move into these areas to feed on the young sunfish and they will hit your Sunfish Slider when you fish it with a slow 6-inch, strip-pause-strip action.

The Shenandoah Chuggar, with its fat body and deeply cupped face, helps you attract bass in fast currents and from deep water.

The Gray Scaled Chuggar, size 4, has a general minnow appearance, and it is very effective below riffles where dying and struggling minnows are often shunted. Wade into the river 10 feet below where the riffles taper into the flat water of the main pools. Cast 40 feet straight across this interface and impart two, fast 10 inch line hand strips then pause five seconds. This mimics the struggling action of a dying minnow and the bass usually hit it as soon as you pause in the retrieve. Fish this across the current with this strip-pause-strip action until the Chuggar is within 20 feet of you. Wade downstream 5 feet and repeat this same method of Chuggar action. This ploy is effective downstream for 100 feet below the riffle, so move along slowly and cover the water thoroughly.

The Shenandoah Gray Scaled Chuggar, size 4, is also very effective when you float large rivers like the James and New. As you drift along look for shallow gravel bars along the riverbanks that taper out into deep

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Top: Many of the students in the author's fly-fishing schools learn to catch large smallmouth bass below riffles on the Shenandoah Gray Chuggar by making it act like a dying minnow. Above: Jeff Murray, the author's son, took this impressive smallmouth using a Shenandoah Chuggar while on the South Fork of the Shenandoah River.

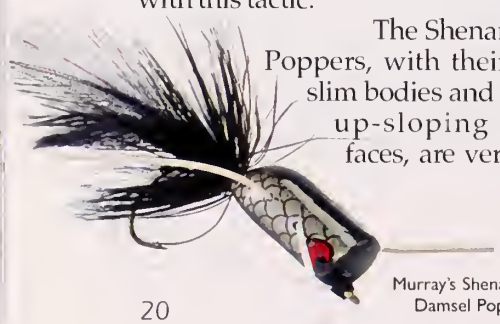
Murray's Shenandoah Chartreuse Chugger

water that is moving at a good pace. Many large bass cruise these areas to feed on the minnows, which live on the gravel bars. An excellent tactic is to drift about a 100 feet out in the river from the bank and cast your Chuggar 20 degrees downstream in toward the gravel bar. Immediately begin a series of firm foot-long strips with your line hand every 10 seconds to get the bass'es attention. Expect the strike when your Chuggar is over water, which is 3 to 4 feet deep. Continue this method as long as you have the gravel bars along the banks. There are many stretches like this on the James River downstream from Scottsville and on the New River downstream from Radford.

When you are wading or floating sections of a river which have shaded banks, with water over 4 feet deep over a cobblestone stream bottom right beside the bank, the Shenandoah Chartreuse Chuggar, size 4, is outstanding. This bug in these areas gives us many great smallmouth in our guide trips each year. A good tactic is to cast the Chuggar so it lands 2 feet off the bank and let it lie motionless for 10 seconds. If you do not get a strike immediately use a retrieve of imparting two 6-inch firm line hand strips every five seconds until you have fished the Chuggar 20 feet out from the bank; then pick it up and cast it to a spot 10 feet further down the bank as you wade or float downstream. The South Fork of the Shenandoah River downstream from Luray will give you great fishing with this tactic.

The Shenandoah Poppers, with their long slim bodies and gentle up-sloping flat faces, are very versatile, letting us duplicate some of the tactics used with the Sliders and Chuggars in addition taking bass in some situations better than other bugs.

For example, the Shenandoah Damsel Popper size 6 will give you many big bass along the bank-grass beds. The natural damselflies emerge from these grass beds and rest upon them from June to October. Miles of this type water can be found on the James River upstream from Buchanan. Wade down the river 50



Murray's Shenandoah Damsel Popper

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Above: Virginia's smallmouth bass rivers offer many miles of excellent fishing that are accessible by floating boats and canoes. Float fishing also allows you greater access to hard to reach places and gives the angler a chance to sneak up on the big ones.

feet out from these grass beds, cast your Damsel Popper to within a foot of the grass and get ready for the strike right away. These bass are accustomed to taking the naturals quickly and they will often take your bug within the first several seconds. If you don't get a strike right away use a slow line hand stripping action to swim the Popper 6 inches every 10 seconds until you have fished it out 10 feet, then pick it up and cast it to a new location 10 feet further downstream. Continue this method by wading slowly downstream as far as the grass reaches.

The Shenandoah Damsel Popper, size 6, is outstanding around the aquatic grass beds that encircle the river-crossing limestone ledges. Many of these ledges reach from 100 to 200 feet across the river and may have several 10-foot wide gaps in them where the river rushes through. The aquatic grass beds downstream of these ledges reach right across to these gaps and the bass feed heavily just downstream of the grass at the edge of these currents. Wade from downstream up to within 50 feet of these grass beds, and cast your Damsel Popper up tight against the grass and strip it out very slowly. Methodically wade and fish all the way across below these ledges, paying special attention to the areas right beside the gaps where the currents push through. From July until October many of our rivers provide great fishing in these areas. I've had especially good fishing with this tactic on the Rappahannock River above the ledges at Kelly's Ford.

I've saved the best until last. I'm referring to the Shenandoah Blue Popper. This is the surface bug I usually start with each day because it seldom lets me down. It is also the most popular bug we sell in my fly shop, shipping thousands all across the county and Canada for the last 20 years. We owe Bill Gallash a great debt for developing this color almost 50 years ago because no one believes how effective these are until they try them. However, after fishing with them they never want to be without them.

Fish these over hip-deep water along shaded banks at dusk and you will catch many great fish. The largest smallmouth bass I've ever hooked took my Shenandoah Blue Popper, size 4, fished in this type cover a half-mile upstream from Nash's Ford on the Clinch River, one warm July evening. Unfortunately, for me, he did not want to have his picture taken. Just as I was landing him and

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Top: The author's first choice in surface bugs for smallmouth bass is his Shenandoah Blue Popper as shown here. Above: Remember a smallmouth bass is too valuable to be caught only once. Releasing him to fight another day will help to assure others the same thrill of catching him.

getting ready to take his picture he spit my popper right back in my face.

Other areas in which you can catch many large bass on the Shenandoah Blue Poppers are the tails of the pools, especially at dawn and dusk. In these low-light levels large bass move into the lower 100 to 200 feet of the pools to feed heavily upon minnows and any food drifting on the surface. A good way to fish these areas is to wade into the upper end of the riffles then turn and wade cautiously upstream into the tails of the pools. Cast your Shenandoah Blue Popper, size 6, upstream 40 feet and quickly remove all of the slack with your line hand so you can set the hook quickly because, often, you will get a strike in the first several seconds. Impart a very slow 10-inch pull with your line hand every five seconds in order to swim your bug back downstream just slightly faster than the speed of the current. Your goal is to make your bug look like a real minnow or natural bug struggling helplessly along the surface. The bass in these shallow pool tails are here to feed and they can seldom pass up your bug fished in this way. Continue to wade on up into the tail of the pool and fan your casts up and across stream in order to cover all of the water up to waist deep in this manner.

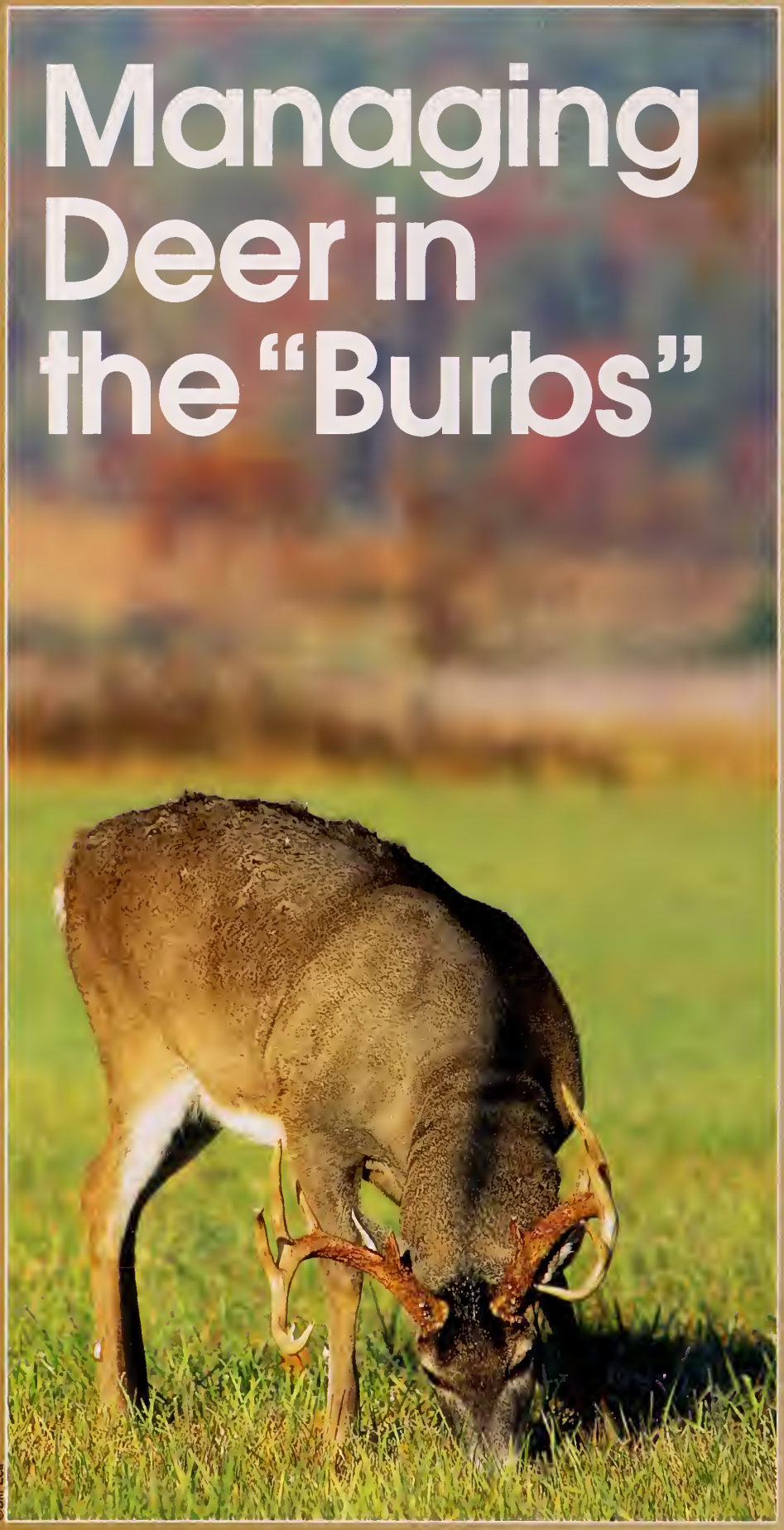
In addition to these two methods of fishing the Shenandoah Blue Popper, I encourage you to experiment with it in all types of cover throughout the season. It just might become your favorite surface bug, also.

If you would like to experience exciting smallmouth fishing throughout Virginia you should try this gentleman of the warm water species with hard head surface bugs. He will seldom let you down. □

Harry Murray is the owner of Murray's Fly Shop in Edinburg, Va. He has written numerous books and articles on fly-fishing. For complete information on many of the best trout streams in Virginia showing their locations, and hatches see the book "Virginia Blue Ribbon Streams," which is available from the Shenandoah Publishing Company, P. O. Box 156, Edinburg VA 22824. Phone (540) 984-4212.

Murray's Shenandoah Blue Popper

Managing Deer in the "Burbs"



©Bill Lea

Local bowhunters band together to assist with a unique approach to suburban whitetail management in Northern Virginia.

by Ken Perrotte

A man driving a nondescript pickup truck dims his lights and pulls into a darkened driveway near the end of a cul-de-sac. Stately houses meet wooded green space that buffers a small creek running through the expansive neighborhood. It's not quite the "country," but it certainly isn't the "city."

The driver checks his watch, noting the sun will be up in less than an hour. He quietly leaves the vehicle, toting a small duffel bag and a hard-shell carrying case containing the most critical gear needed for his operation.

Just inside the woods, he opens the bag and slips on coveralls that will help him blend into the background. He unsheathes his quiet, lethal tools.

The first lights flicker in a nearby home. If previous patterns hold, she'll show on time, 6:38 a.m., soon after the first glow of sunlight shines through the bare trees. He waits patiently and motionless, certain she'll slowly make her way with comfortable familiarity through the yard and around the side of the house.

Thwack! The arrow cleanly finds its mark. Most people in the area haven't poured their morning cup of coffee yet and only squirrels peeking from treetop nests witness the deed.

Another white-tailed deer doe living in the "burbs" and munching pricey perennials has fallen to the archery hunting professionals of

Suburban Whitetail Management of Northern Virginia (SWMNV).

Suburban deer problems got you down? Who you gonna call?

Eric Huppert formed the SWMNV organization nearly a decade ago. The organization, which doesn't charge for its services, was conceived as a way to partner bowhunters and homeowners in a common sense solution to help reduce and then manage deer herd sizes in three Northern Virginia counties (Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William) that the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) flagged as needing special attention.

Today, the organization has nearly 75 members and 150 properties where homeowners have enlisted its help in controlling deer.

Nowhere in Virginia is evidence so profound about the adaptability of white-tailed deer as in these northern tier counties. Upscale developments with home sites of varying acreage, networks of creeks protected by wooded riparian buffers and scattered parklands help create habitat that can hold large numbers of deer.

As they consume the available natural vegetation for feed, deer quickly move into areas now claimed by humans. Pickings are easy and they mow through almost any edible landscaping.

Absent natural predators, motor vehicles end up as a common means of "thinning" local deer herds. Nearly 2,000 deer are killed annually by vehicles in each of these counties, according to Department regional wildlife biologist Jerry Sims —and that only includes those that are reported.

©Ken Perrotte

Right: Homeowner John Bentz shows hunters Roger Jask, left, and Mike Day where deer are stripping foliage bare adjacent to his backyard patio.

Collisions represent a costly, dangerous consequence when deer exceed either the biological carrying capacity or what many biologists call the "social carrying capacity" of the land. Malnutrition and other negative impacts also ensue.

The archers focus on harvesting antlerless deer before and after the regular hunting season using kill permits, and taking antlerless as well as antlered deer during the regular bow season using Damage Control Assistance Program (DCAP) and regular big game tags.

It s All Business

A diverse range of people and businesses, many of them unfamiliar with hunting, populate this portion of Virginia. Consequently, the SMWNV bowhunting group worked to steadily position its members as hunting professionals, individuals you could trust on your property to be sensitive to your needs, as well as the needs of your community.

Interestingly, the approach with which SMWNV "markets" its services meshes with a tactic touted by Steven S. Little, a senior consultant for *Inc. Magazine*, who advised a major gathering of shooting industry representatives earlier this year that huntings future largely rests on the ability to overcome a "bubba factor" perception among non-hunters.

Suburban Whitetail Management of Northern Virginia is all business. While the group is grounded in hunting, they resist any attempt to label the organization a "hunt club."

We are a "deer management organization," governed by strict by-laws and ethical standards," explained SWMNV Loudoun County coordinator Steve Barry, a partner in a global certified public accounting firm.

Left: Bowhunter Roger Jask makes his way from the narrow patch of woods behind the home of a property owner that enlisted the deer management organization's assistance in controlling the numbers of deer damaging their plants.

Prospective members are carefully screened and must pass annual qualification requirements that go well beyond the standards seen by most hunting-oriented groups. For example, members test annually to verify they can place broadhead-tipped arrows within a 6-inch circle at 30 yards.

It doesn't matter if the ghost of Fred Bear himself was to apply for membership, all SWMNV candidates must complete the International Bowhunter Education Program (IBEP) course, which covers safety, animal behavioral characteristics (with focus on reaction to bow shots), proper shot selection and much more. Several members are also IBEP instructors.

The organization has a diverse membership, with many educated professionals, including a number of active and retired members of the armed forces, architects, surveyors, information technology consultants, a librarian for the Library of Congress, professional firefighters, contractors and electricians and retirees from all walks of life.

Regular business meetings feature detailed PowerPoint presentations outlining successes, issues and future objectives.

Similarly, detailed and persuasive presentations explain for homeowners associations and other prospective "clients" the environmental, health and safety issues associated with excessive deer populations. They make a case for bowhunting as a cost-effective, efficient tool to control deer at no cost to the homeowner.

Recognizing that people with no hunting exposure may have concerns or fears grounded in fallacious perceptions, SWMNV hones in on the experience and skill levels of its members, showing graphically how treestands are positioned and how arrow trajectory won't endanger residents or nearby homes.

While most bowhunters take shots out to 30-40 yard ranges, the suburban archers limit themselves to shots closer to 20 yards, facilitating clean kills and recovery of deer on or close to the willing homeowner's property. Property owners adjacent to those enrolled in the program are approached for written permission to "track and recover" deer.

Every arrow is labeled and coded. On the rare occasion a hunter can't locate an arrow metal detectors are brought in to locate it. Lost arrows are not an acceptable option, the group is told during a business meeting.

©Ken Perrotte

Above: Mike Day, a firefighter and longtime SWMNV bowhunter, offers a smile after a successful hunt where he used a damage control permit to take a doe.

Increasing Acceptance for Bowhunting Solution

Barry explained that many subdivisions often have "no hunting" provisions when they are established. He is seeing receptiveness to change and a willingness to embrace hunting, and specifically bowhunting, as a means of managing the deer population.

"I have talked with many people that have changed their attitudes in the past five years. When they moved to their current residences, many people report they enjoyed seeing the deer, appreciating their beauty, and being 'anti-hunting' or at least somewhat negatively disposed to the thought," Barry said. "Now, while they still enjoy the animals, they recognize the environmental damage the growing herd can cause by over browsing as well as the increased risk of Lyme disease (carried by ticks) and car-deer collisions."

Bob Flanagan, SMWNV's Fairfax County coordinator, has also witnessed rapidly changing attitudes, citing the response to the organization following an article in the Washington Post a couple years ago.

"By the following Tuesday we had more than 30 phone calls and other hits on our Web site from folks seeking deer management. Even folks who don't want management seem to know that there are few workable solutions in Fairfax and that bowhunting should be considered. Of course, there are those who don't want any kind of hunting anywhere," Flanagan said.

County coordinators respond to inquiries from potential clients, usually meeting with the homeowner to evaluate the property to determine if it can be safely and successfully hunted. Barry said the lot size, appropriate "climbable" trees, cover, apparent deer travel patterns, location and sensitivity of neighbors, other structures, animals, etc., all enter in consideration.

When everything works out, "The county coordinator provides the property owner with a client permission form to complete and sign

which gives SWMNV written permission to hunt the property and identifies any specific instructions from the landowner—such as where to park, times of the day or week when they prefer we not hunt, whether they wish to share in any venison harvested or any other specific instructions," Barry said.

Flanagan and Barry assign hunters to accepted properties.

©Ken Perrotte

Above: Bowhunter Rodger Jask nocks an arrow in preparation for a hunt. As a SWMNV, Jask must ensure his equipment and archery skills are in top shape.

"When possible, a plot map and aerial photo are provided to the hunters (sometimes available through the county). The hunter is asked to walk the property with the client and become familiar with the property lines so as to hunt the property to minimize the chance of a deer leaving the property," Barry said.

The county coordinators stay in close communication with hunters and property owners to assess success and progress, deal with any issues that may arise and meet with game wardens, government officials or others in the county interested in deer management or deer issues.

Hunters Helping Homeowners

Flanagan spotlighted the fairly new community of Roseland in Fairfax as an excellent case study of how hunters worked with a homeowners association and are now assisting property owners with deer damage issues.

Roseland does seem to offer a textbook suburban deer habitat with five-acre minimum wooded lots, a creek bottom snaking through the property and a wide power line sporting thick cover at the edges. Besides the natural forage, deer also get an exotic smorgasbord of annual and perennial plants courtesy of homeowners.

Property owner John Bentz walked around his home's exterior, grabbing the tops of a variety of shrubs, noting where deer nip off the buds almost as soon as they develop. Plants that should've been a couple feet tall still hugged the ground, unable to generate new growth.

"They nibble the azaleas, the rose bushes, some holly shrubs and more. They are so brazen that they walk up onto patio and eat," Bentz said.

"Mike Whalen led the efforts in this community and it was a two-year process to get the homeowner covenants changed to allow hunting. From our perspective, everybody is complaining about the damage from deer, plus there have been collisions in the neighborhood," Bentz added.

He said 15 of the 90 properties in the community now allow hunters onto the land, with a sizeable number more permitting track and retrieve efforts.

A non-hunter, Bentz was uncertain what to expect when SWMNV was enjoined to help the area manage its deer issues. He now sounds like a total convert to a hunting solution and said he enjoys a little venison once in a while.

"Both sides benefit. The hunters get to hunt and we get deer removed. The hunters we have met, and I've met six different hunters, are 100 percent professionals. Any neighbors who had fears of hunters going awry—well, those are totally unfounded," Bentz said.

The hunters of SWMN made 1,166 trips to the woods and took 225 deer in 2005, more than double the number taken just five years earlier. They complete detailed logs from each hunt. Many of the deer are donated to the Hunters for the Hungry program and the group stages a golf tournament annually that partially benefits the charity organization.

Flanagan wants to see a 500-deer year before 2010.

The VDGIF's Sims, whose area includes Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William Counties, welcomes the goal.

©Ken Perrotte

Alex Pasly of Spotsylvania County, one of SWMNV's southernmost members, talks with Department wildlife biologist Jerry Sims during a club business meeting and offers his perspective on adjusting archery seasons.

"These are our trouble counties," he said. "We've got to try to get the deer up here under control," he said, adding he is hopeful more properties will embrace hunting as a herd management solution."

Ken Perrotte is a writer and outdoor columnist for the "Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star" and lives in King George County.

For more information about Suburban Whitetail Management of Northern Virginia, see www.swmnv.com, email swmnv@swmnv.com or call 571-215-8483.

2006 Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp Unveiled

by Bob Ellis
Assistant Director of Wildlife

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is proud to announce the selection of the artwork for the 2006 Virginia State Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp. The artwork depicts a pair of American black ducks painted by Virginia artist Tim Donovan. Tim's work was selected from five other entrees in this year's stamp contest. The judging panel was made up of representatives from the state chapter of Ducks Unlimited, Virginia Waterfowlers Association, and Waterfowl USA along with department staff from the waterfowl program and media section. All en-

tered artwork were from Virginia artists.

Mr. Donovan resides at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Lovettsville, Virginia and is no stranger to the waterfowl stamp world, winning Virginia's 2000 and 2001 voluntary duck stamp contest, the Kentucky state duck stamp contest in 2000, the Ohio state duck stamp in 1998 and recently placing fifth at the 2006 Federal Duck stamp contest. He has also placed in the top 20 at the Federal contest in 2002 and the top 10 in 2001.

Tim grew up on Maryland's Eastern Shore and spent summers on the shores of Solomon's Island along the Chesapeake Bay. As a young boy he experienced a wide diversity of wildlife from otters to ospreys that would both capture his spirit and direct his path. Tim's love of wildlife was passed down from his father who was a helicopter pilot and would donate his time flying researchers on the Peregrine Falcon program to count and band birds at their nesting sites. Asked why he chose the black duck, Tim recalled his years on the Eastern Shore seeing many of these wary and intelligent birds in the marshes and noting how somewhat plain they were at a distance: up close the contrasting colors between the black duck's head and body were quite striking. Not pursuing painting until the age of 30, Tim was self taught at first and then enrolled in college at the University of Texas where he majored in art. After college he apprenticed with artist Matt Zoll, a traditional realist. He learned how to grind his own pigments and make his own mediums. His black duck work is a combination of egg tempera and oils, which gives his winning painting a unique look.

As Bob Duncan, Wildlife Division Director, points out "the black duck is a fitting selection for our Virginia stamp. Few species symbolizes Virginia's waterfowl and wildfowling heritage more." Black ducks are highly revered because of their wild and wary nature, and prized by birdwatchers and waterfowlers alike. Virginia over-winters some of the highest numbers of black ducks along the East Coast, with 15,000 to 20,000 counted each year during aerial surveys. They are most abundant in coastal marsh habitats where they are a symbol of Atlantic Flyway heritage and coastal wetlands health, but can be found throughout the state. Black ducks breed from the Mid-Atlantic States, north through the Canadian Maritimes and boreal forest, and west to the Great Lakes Region. Virginia is at the southern end of the black duck breeding range but a significant number of black ducks historically nested in the Chesapeake Bay and coastal seaside marshes.

Black ducks have undergone a long-term population decline over the past 50 years, and they are currently recognized as a species of concern by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Direct habitat loss and landscape level changes in habitat conditions in eastern North America are major factors in this decline. Other factors that have had detrimental impacts on black ducks include environmental changes such as sea-level rise and predator pressures, increasing human disturbance, and interactions with other species, the mallard in particular. Special conservation measures and research programs have been initiated to address these concerns. The Black Duck Joint Venture, one of the focuses of The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, was established to aid in black duck population recovery. Individual states have implemented programs to address black duck needs, and international management strategies involving the United States and Canada are being implemented. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is an important partner in these efforts. VDGIF is conducting research to identify factors limiting black duck productivity in Virginia, including evaluations of nesting habitat quality, breeding success, and brood survival. Ducks Unlimited is also embarking on Black Duck research around the Chesapeake Bay. VDGIF and its conservation partners are also working to preserve and enhance black duck habitats throughout the Commonwealth.

Tim Donovan will be recognized at the upcoming Ducks Unlimited convention where his print will be unveiled. Ducks Unlimited, under contract with the Department, retains the license for the artwork and provides the service in fulfillment of the hunter stamps and the collector stamps. Ducks Unlimited also handles the sale of the prints. Last year a total of 18, 879 Migratory Waterfowl conservation privileges were sold generating $169,911. The monies generated from all sales of the Virginia Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp will be placed in the department's Game Protection Fund and accounted for under a separate fund designated as the Virginia Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp Fund (the Stamp Fund) and will be used to 1.) contract with appropriate nonprofit organizations for cooperative waterfowl habitat improvement projects within Virginia, 2.) protect, preserve, restore, enhance and develop waterfowl habitat in Virginia through the department's waterfowl program and 3.) offset the administrative costs associated with production, issuance of, and accounting for the Stamp.

Look for the stamp to be available July 1, 2006. □

The 2006 Virginia State Migratory Waterfowl Conservation Stamp judges (left to right) Rich Johann, Va. Waterfowlers Association; Gary Costanzo, VDGIF Wildlife Biologist; Richard Hudson, Ducks Unlimited; Carol Kushlak, "Virginia Wildlife" magazine; Frank Wade, Waterfowl USA and Tom Bidrowski, VDGIF Waterfowl Project Leader.

2006 Outdoor Calendar of Events

July 7–9: *Virginia Outdoor Weekend* at Twin Lakes State Park in Green Bay in Prince Edward County. For more information call 804-367-0656.

July 25: *Saltwater Fishing Workshop* at Smith Point Marina in Northumberland County. For more information call 804-367-6778.

August 2: *Flat Out Catfishing Clinic* on James River, Richmond. For more information call 804-367-6778.

August 18–20: *Mother Daughter Outdoors* at Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center in Appomattox. For more information call 804-367-0656.

by Beth Hester

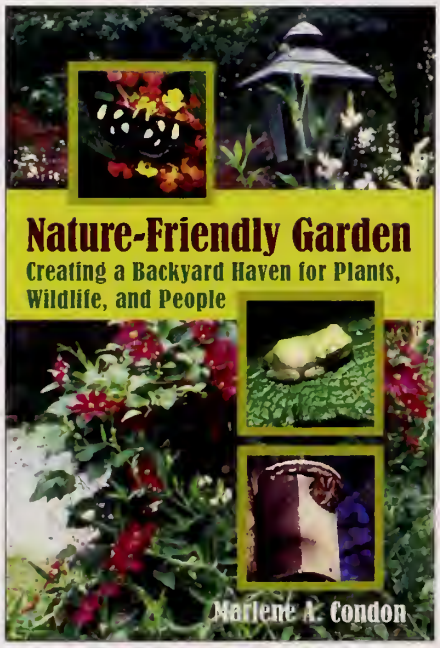
Nature-Friendly Garden
by Marlene A. Condon
2006 Stackpole Books
ISBN: 978-0-8177-3261-1
Color photographs

Whether you tend many acres, or a mid-sized patch of yard, your gardening experience doesn't have to feel like an episode straight out of Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling. Virginia gardener and photographer Marlene Condon feels your pain, and her new book: Nature-Friendly Garden, gives you the confidence and tools you need to create low-impact, backyard sanctuaries while respecting the natural processes at work. By gently modifying and maintaining landscape, you can attract diverse plants and animals, restore balance, and greatly reduce the need to curb certain invasive pests. The result? You'll have more time to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Condon has observed the outdoor drama unfolding daily in the half-acre yard of her Crozet, Virginia home. "Every year in my garden is different…every day is a new day for me, I never know what I'll see. It's about so much more than birds and butterflies".

Indeed. In fact, her text is generously illustrated with the color photographs she originally began taking to prove to skeptics that the eastern screech owls, tufted titmice, red-backed salamanders and southern flying squirrels that populate her garden were real.

Incorporated are three handy reference sections: Plants That Attract Wildlife, Tips to Help Garden Wildlife, and Scientific Names of Species. Ms. Condon closes her book with thoughtful chapters on gardening while coping with physical limitations like arthritis, and she encourages readers to share the healing beauty of green space with those in nursing homes, hospice care centers and hospitals, by volunteering with groups such as the National Federation of Garden Clubs.



The Nature-Friendly Garden may be purchased directly from Ms. Condon for $22.95, shipping included. Her address: P.O. Box 235, White Hall, Virginia 22987. She welcomes inquiries via email at: MARLENECONDON@aol.com.

Times and Places, Home and Away: The Autobiography of Charles F. Waterman
by Charles Waterman
1988 GSJ Press
Hardcover with black and white photos
ISBN: 0-9609842-8-3

It's so inspiring to read about men and women who lead jam-packed lives doing what they love, and though he died in 2005 at the age of 91, outdoor writer, and roving journalist "Charley" Waterman spent a solid 60 years building up a body of honest outdoor writing. Author of 19 books and numerous articles, he was treasured by readers for his self-effacing good humor and expertise as an outdoorsman. That many of his adventures were shared with his wife Debie, is a tribute to an enviable partnership of like minds.

His autobiography is more than a good read. There is detailed atmosphere of old-school freedom associated with his tales…a kind of well-being of the sort you feel on a fall day, when the crisp air is tinged with the scent of wood smoke and possibility. This is not to say that all Waterman's trips were smooth sailing. There are vehicle breakdowns, hair-raising car rides through Buenos Aires, fish and game taken, fish and game lost.

Often, the memories he recounts are delightfully loopy, such as the hilarious results of his attempt to steady his nerves before an NRA pistol competition, methods which today would be suspect to say the least. But I suppose you could expect nothing less from someone who was also a WW II combat photographer, pro-wrestler and reformed boxcar rider. From Montana to the Everglades, Charley Waterman has put it all down on paper for you to savor. □

Out of the Mouths of Babes

by Jennifer Worrell

Children can say some off-the-wall things, but one thing most little ones can offer is guaranteed honesty. Officer Joe Valasek remembers running into one such tyke while checking up on a farm in Hanover County on the last day of deer season in the early 1990's. The year he recalls happened to be the first one where it was legal to kill two deer per day. He noted several vehicles on the premises, but he saw only a little boy.

"Hey, Mister, did you come here to hunt?" asked the young fellow, obviously not one bit shy.

Valasek laughed as he was in full uniform. "No, Son, I'm working," answered the warden.

The persistent little boy answered, "Too bad, this is a GREAT place to hunt!"

Valasek's ears perked up. "Is it?" he asked.

"Oh, yeah! My brother killed three deer today!" the child answered innocently.

The officer was immediately on the case. "Where is your brother now?" asked Valasek, trying to sound as innocent as his young informant.

"Oh, he's down in the woods trying to get another one!" the boy cheerfully returned.

When Valasek found the older brother, he did everything possible to lead the boy to believe that he had been under surveillance all day. After all, the kind-hearted warden did not want to create a sibling rivalry of this potential magnitude. The errant brother spilled everything and showed the officer where he had stashed the untagged deer.

After Valasek filed the appropriate charges, the suspect finally realized he had been taken for a ride.

"You didn't have me under surveillance all day—my little brother told you!" cried the violator.

Valasek would neither confirm nor deny the statement. He was, however, quite grateful that day for the existence of annoying little brothers. □

A Peach of an Idea

Planning a trip to "The Beach" this summer? Why not double your pleasure by making time to stop at the Knotts Island Peach and Wildlife Festival, just down the road from Virginia Beach. The combined events are sponsored by the area's local Ruritan Clubs and will be held Saturday, July 29 and 30th, at the Ruritan Community Park and Knotts Island Elementary School. Festival goers will have an opportunity to enjoy local music acts, children's activities, along with displays from local artists, photographers and decoy carvers. Much of the artwork and carving highlight the areas rich sporting traditions.

Proceeds from the money raised at the Knotts Island Peach & Wildlife Festival goes to helping support the Knotts Island and Creed Volunteer Fire Departments and local organizations. For more information visit: http://www.knottsislandonline.com

Correction

In our April 2006 issue we ran a story titled "What a Sucker!" We inadvertently left off one of the writers of the story. Her name is Lori Roberts. We apologize for this oversite. □

Nongame Tax Checkoff Program

Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Virginia's Nongame Wildlife Program by helping to support essential research and management of Virginia's native birds, fish and other nongame animals.

If you would like to make a cash donation directly to the Virginia Nongame Wildlife Program using a VISA or MasterCard, you can visit the Department's Web site for more information or mail a check made payable to: Virginia Nongame Program and mail it to Virginia Nongame Program, 4010 W. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

Remember, that this is your chance to help with the management of Virginia's wildlife. □

Report Wildlife Violations
1-800-237-5712

"We're going to see some action, Al. I just heard a deer grunt"

On The Water

by Jim Crosby

Does Your Boat Have Wheels?

Does your boat have wheels is a very appropriate question for many Virginia boaters. The majority of recreational boaters tow their vessels to and from their boating adventures.

The best advice I can offer: Work to keep your towing from becoming an adventure on its own. A fellow boater had to get a ticket to remind me how the Motor Vehicle Laws of Virginia affect the boater.

This boater was cited for not having a current inspection sticker on his boat trailer. This is a law that is often forgotten by boaters. The rule is: If your trailer has brakes, it must be inspected and display a current inspection approval sticker on the tongue. Upon hearing this, one boater replied, "My brakes haven't worked since I owned the boat and that has been more than five years." The law is very hard to enforce on the road because the sticker must be viewed from the left side of the trailer and is very difficult for law enforcement to see while moving down the highway. Enforcement almost always occurs after a traffic stop for some other reason.

Why have boat trailer brakes? That is a question that begs for an answer! Just let me list the reasons.

Your vehicle brakes are designed to provide reasonable braking power for its own weight and doesn't take into consideration the addition of as much as double the vehicle weight when adding a vessel and its trailer. While many boaters will state that they just don't have any trouble stopping, they just haven't faced an absolute emergency stop, much less one on a less than perfect roadway.

When all the stopping power comes from the towing vehicle, the trailer starts to push the vehicle with its momentum and if the whole load is not in a perfect, straight line the trailer will begin to swing around on the vehicle causing what is commonly termed as a jackknife.

Motor vehicle brakes are designed to offer the majority of braking power to the rear wheels to make the vehicle stop in a straight line. If your front brakes should lock up on you first, you will almost always spin around during the stop. The same principle applies to braking with a trailer. If you have no braking power in the trailer, it will almost always push the vehicle into a spin.

I have heard boaters say, "I really didn't realize how much the trailer brakes assist in a stop until I had them fixed and felt them working. They make a bigger difference than one can imagine."

The majority of boat trailers have "surge brakes" as a type. They have a master cylinder between the tongue of the trailer and the hitch on the tow vehicle. When the forward motion of the tow vehicle begins to slow, the pressure from the weight of the trailer compresses the master cylinder that transfers hydraulic pressure to the brakes in an equal force that brings the two together in stopping power. This contributes to a straight stop for both. On dry pavement coupled with modest driving habits, the average driver would not even be aware of the assistance being offered by the trailer's brakes. A slight change in circumstances can wreak havoc during the attempt to stop in a panic.

The first recognition of the operation of surge brakes occurs for some boaters when they try to back their boat up a slight, or worse, a steep grade. The more you push with the tow vehicle, the more pressure you are applying to the trailer brakes. What you are doing is trying to back the whole load of the vessel and its trailer with the brakes fully applied.

Fortunately, surge brakes have a device to prevent the application of the brakes when backing. Unfortunately, many towing boaters don't know this and end up spinning tires and putting a lot of pressure on the engines of their tow vehicles.

This is a strong case for reading the instructions before beginning to operate any machinery. The surge brake master cylinder usually has a decal explaining how to deactivate the brakes when backing. It usually involves placing a pin in the plunger so it can't compress the hydraulic fluid to activate the brakes.

WARNING: In this case, if you deactivate the master cylinder while backing, don't forget to pull the pin before moving ahead again because if you forget, you will have no forward braking power.

Oh, one other thing you should know when towing a boat trailer that has surge brakes is you will note a movement between the boat trailer and the vehicle as you accelerate and decelerate. That is the movement of the master cylinder plunger working back and forward. This can be a little disconcerting if you don't understand what is happening. □

Feedback, questions or suggestions are always welcome sent to jimcrosby@adelphia.net.

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

Megapixel Cameras: What is Best For Me?

When it comes to digital cameras, one of the big questions always seems to be, "how many megapixels do I really need?" Nowadays, there are a wide variety of digital cameras ranging from the three megapixel consumer variety, up to the large format digital cameras with more than 30 megapixels.

The first thing to remember is what megapixel means. Mega, a million, and pixel, a unit of data, means one million units of data. So, a three megapixel camera records three million pixels of information on its sensor for each image taken and a 12.8 megapixel camera, like the Canon 5D, records 12.8 million pixels.

Now that you know megapixels are millions of pixels you should understand that the more megapixels you have, the more information and detail you can achieve in your photographs. In order to figure out how many megapixels you will need, you first need to decide what you're going to do with your photographs. If you just want to make small prints or send digital images to friends via e-mail, then a three megapixel camera will work fine. But, if you want to shoot for a stock photography agency or a magazine cover, you will probably have to get a 12.8 or larger megapixel camera.

On average, most folks just want to make really nice prints of their digital images. Above is a chart that will give you a general "rule of thumb" for selecting a camera which will give you enough megapixels to make nice, quality prints. (These sizes are based on shooting at a low compression setting; super fine, large, etc.)

Next month, we're going to switch gears a bit and I'm going to show you a neat product for all of those long lens shooters out there. Stay tuned and happy shooting! □

3 megapixel camera	up to 5 X 7
4 megapixel camera	up to 8 X 10
5 megapixel camera	maybe up to 11 X14
6 megapixel and up	16 X 20, maybe 20 X 24
8 megapixel camera	up to 20 X 30, maybe 30 X 40
12 megapixel camera	30 X 40 and up

Image of the Month

Congratulations go to Nancy B. Anderson of Roanoke, for her photograph of a cute, peanut toting grey squirrel watching from above. Nancy shot this image at a park in downtown Roanoke with a Nikon D100 camera and a 20-200mm Nikkor lens. Good job Nancy!

You are invited to submit one to five of your best images to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA, 23230-1104. Send original slides, high quality prints, or high res jpeg files on disk and include a self addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where the image was captured, what camera, film, and settings you used. I hope to see your image as our next, "Image of the Month!"

RECIPES

by Joan Cone

Captain John Smith - The First to Eat Cownose Ray

Captain John Smith, while exploring Chesapeake Bay, was the first white man to step upon a cownose ray. Its stinger pierced his leg, and he killed it with his sword and ate it for dinner declaring it was delicious. This is how Sting Ray Point received its name.

Once a ray is boated, it should be killed at once and the wings removed as close to the body as possible. These you ice down, discarding the body overboard. Filleting them is easy because of the transverse sheet of cartilage which runs through the center. After filleting, skin your fillets. The result is large fillets of mottled firm flesh which taste much like veal. A ray of about 40 pounds will yield approximately six pounds of boned, skinned fillets ready to cook.

Menu

Sautéed Ray
Molded Potato Salad
Basil Vegetable Toss
Fresh Fruit Shortcakes

Sautéed Ray

1 to 1 1/2 pounds cownose ray fillets, skinned
1 egg beaten or 1/4 cup egg substitute
Dry bread crumbs
Salt and pepper to taste
3 to 4 tablespoons butter or margarine

Dip fillets in egg and then roll in dry bread crumbs seasoned with salt and pepper. Heat butter in a large skillet and sauté meat until browned on one side. Turn fillets over with a spatula and quickly brown on other side, about 10 minutes total cooking time or until meat is cooked through. Do not overcook, as ray toughens with overcooking. Serves 3 to 4.

Molded Potato Salad

6 medium potatoes (about 2 pounds), unpeeled, cooked, chilled
2 hard-cooked eggs, chopped
1/3 cup chopped sweet pickles
1/3 cup lowfat mayonnaise
1/4 cup light sour cream
Grated peel and juice of 1 lemon (3 tablespoons juice)
2 tablespoons chopped pimiento
1 tablespoon sugar
Salt and white pepper to taste
1/2 teaspoon celery seed

Peel and cube potatoes. In large bowl, combine potatoes and remaining ingredients. Press mixture firmly into lightly oiled 6-cup ring mold; chill.

Run knife around inside of mold and invert onto serving plate. Makes about 6 cups.

Basil Vegetable Toss
(For microwave)

1 small onion, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium zucchini, sliced
1 small red bell pepper, cut into 1-inch squares
1/2 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
Salt and pepper to taste
3 tablespoons minced fresh basil or parsley
3 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

In a small casserole, place onion and oil. Cook on HIGH 4 minutes. Stir in zucchini and bell pepper. Cover and continue to cook 2 minutes, until slightly tender. Stir in mushrooms, salt and pepper. Cover and cook on HIGH 2 minutes or until mushrooms are just tender. Add basil and toss. Serve with a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese. Serves 4.

Fresh Fruit Shortcakes

The new refrigerated piecrusts from Pillsbury are rolled rather than folded. Besides using them in pie plates and tart pans, they also can be cut into dozens of other shapes for quick and easy desserts, such as these layered fruit pastries. Just unroll the dough on a lightly floured surface. Cut circular shapes using a 3-inch round cutter (you'll get 9 circles from each round of piecrust dough—a few more if you reroll the scraps). Brush the top of each 3-inch circle with lightly beaten egg and sprinkle evenly with white sparkling sugar or granulated sugar. Arrange circles on ungreased baking sheets. Bake in a preheated 350° F. oven for 10 to 12 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from baking sheets and cool completely on wire racks. Layer with fresh summer sliced fruits and berries tossed with granulated sugar and a generous dollop of whipped cream or whipped topping. □

VIRGINIA AGRICULTURE
Virginia's Finest

Naturally Wild

story and illustration
by Spike Knuth

Cownose Ray
Rhinoptera bonasus

It appears to fly through the water and feeds in a manner similar to hydraulic mining. The cownose ray is an elasmobranch, an animal related to sharks, skates and other rays that have cartilaginous skeletons and five to seven gill openings. It is one of the most abundant of its clan.

The cownose ray is found along the East Coast from Cape Cod to the Florida Keys and the Gulf of Mexico west to Louisiana. It is a migratory species and is found in the Chesapeake Bay and along the Eastern Shore from May to October. They generally arrive in May and move up the western side of the Bay, ultimately working down the eastern side as they leave in September to October. They inhabit the coastal estuaries and mouths of larger tidal rivers and creeks.

It swims almost bird-like on long, wing-like pectoral fins. It has a long whip-like tail with a spine on top that extends out a ways. The spine has serrated edges and can inflict a painful puncture or cut when the tail is whipped around. One old story tells of Captain John Smith being struck by the tail that had him thinking he might die because of the swelling and pain.

The indention in the front of its head gives it a bilobed appearance like a cow's nose, hence the name. The gill slits are located on its underside as are some fleshy fins. Its colors are dark brown to olive-brown above and white or yellowish-white below. A 4 or 5-year-old ray will measure about 30 inches across its disk. Males are generally smaller averaging 24 pounds while a female will weigh about 30. An adult female can reach a maximum size of around 45 inches across and weigh up to 60 pounds.

Rays are ovoviviparous, that is the embryo in the three or four eggs develop and hatch within the female or immediately upon extrusion. Usually only one of the eggs becomes a young ray and it measures about a foot long at birth. This occurs in late-June or early-July.

Feeding takes place in shallow water usually during high tide, and their prey is primarily worms, crustaceans, shrimp and mollusks. They will stir up sand and sediment from the bottom with their pectoral fins and vacuum up the water into their mouth sorting out the food and expelling the sand, gravel and other detritus. They have flat crushing teeth enabling them to feed on the shellfish. Evidence of their feeding is often visible in shallow water, looking like large, bowl-shaped excavations about 3 feet in diameter and up to a foot deep. Like a giant bluegill or bass spawning bed.

Their appetite for clams and oysters has long been a costly problem to Virginia watermen. Substantial losses have occurred for decades due to cownose ray predation. Attempts to fence off shellfish beds with large mesh nets have been somewhat effective but expensive and labor intensive.

To offset the effects of rays and to institute some control, efforts are being made to establish a limited fishery that could supply foreign and domestic markets with another food type. The fleshy fins can be cut in a number of ways; the most popular being cut up and fried like scallops. A few restaurants have had rays on the menu as a novelty item for a few years and it has received mostly positive responses.

With the coming of colder fall weather rays begin migrating down the Carolina coasts, often seen in schools varying from five or 10 up to several hundred. In one instance a Virginia Institute of Marine Science researcher recorded seeing a school that numbered "in the millions" with rays stacked in columns three or four feet deep at any one point. Other records have schools of up to 10,000 traveling from Florida to the Yucatan, then to Trinidad, Venezuela and Brazil.

Virginia Wildlife Magazine

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Outdoor Catalog *Summer Sizzler*

2006 Limited Edition *Virginia Wildlife* Collector's Knife

This year's knife has been customized for us by Buck Knives. Each knife is individually serial numbered, and comes with a distinctive rosewood handle and gold lettering. This year's knife also includes two white-tailed deer etched on the blade. This custom knife not only comes with a leather sheath, but also a custom made solid, cherry box with a decorative wildlife scene engraved on the cover.

Item #VW-406 $85.00 each

VW-503

VW-502

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Our bass and duck belt buckle collection is crafted of solid pewter with *Virginia Wildlife* engraved at the bottom. Each buckle comes in a custom gift box with the VDGIF distinctive logo displayed.

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2005 Limited Edition Collector's Plate and Stein

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~~Plate $22.95~~
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Item #VW-5200 NOW $29.00 for pair

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From the Ladies Pulsar collection. This attractive watch has a gold tone bracelet with gold tone hands and markers on a champagne dial. Water resistant.

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From the Pulsar Nightfall Line. TiCN plating, gold tone crown, hands and markers and black dial. Water resistant.

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The Virginia Wildlife Calendar is a production of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and customers are reminded that the wildlife calendar starts in September 2006 and will run through December 2007. Quantities are limited and sales will run from July 15 through January 31, 2007, so don't wait. Order now!

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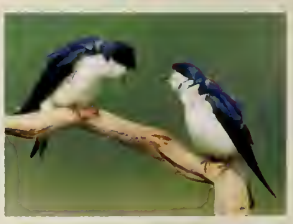

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